

# The Red Shawl by Jack Lait

## SYNOPSIS

Revolution sweeps Grodina. The king is killed by a mob and his daughter, Princess Sabina, escapes in the garb of a peasant. An aged priest, Father Pokoff, accompanies her in flight. The two meet an American newspaper correspondent, Bob Hallam, who bribes guards to permit them to cross the border. Naroush Dupchinsky, a bolshevik, is assigned to seek and kill the princess. He takes passage for America on the same boat with Princess Sabina, who is passing as a peasant girl, Sophia Gorov. Struck by the girl's beauty, Dupchinsky makes love to her, much to her distress. Chaos reigns in Grodina, and Count Jan is sent by leaders of the old regime to find the princess that a marriage between the two may be arranged and the queen put upon her throne. He meets Hallam en route home, confides his mission, and asks his aid.

## FOURTH INSTALLMENT

A STREET LAY LOW through the streets of New York, eying with the curiosity of a bewildered child the strange American ways and folks, she did not suspect that another machine was following. Naroush Dupchinsky, the love sick bolshevik, was hot behind her. He had tabled a friend to meet him at customs. In his car Dupchinsky was trailing Sabina, whose refusals he would not swallow and whom he still confidently planned to make his wife. It seemed extraordinary to him that this girl should make so stubborn a resistance to his suit—in Grodina such behavior was out of all polite usage. However, he calculated, this maiden was affecting a superior attitude because she had left the habits of home behind her. He would cure her of that.

The taxi drew up at the door of a dwelling that had once been a residence of some front and fashion. Now, left between two murky, monster tenement buildings, it looked shabby because of what it had been; it was out of date and looked out of place. The priest dismissed the driver and helped Sabina in with her portables. Dupchinsky, in the machine which had halted at the corner when the taxi slowed up, had his friend make note of the address, then sped on to his own lodgings. Sabina presented a note from the chance traveling companion who had referred her to the resident of the old house, and was received and welcomed.

Weary from the journey, she found the comfortable rooms comparatively pleasant. She squandered no sighs on the hard fortunes which had driven her from a royal palace to such a tawdry hospice, but sank upon the creaking bed in vast relief. If this was to be her retreat, her hiding place, it must be taken in good grace; it was far more tolerable than steering; it might have been worse.

The day passed uneventfully. Toward evening the girl and Father Pokoff ventured a short walk, and returned to dine with reasonable appetite upon the unimposing fare. The hosts were Grodnians, and the dishes were familiar to the royal guest, if not entirely all that might have been desired. The two strangers, fresh from the source of news which so interested all children of Grodina, were peppered with questions. They in return asked eagerly for news which had been published during their interim upon the water, and the gist of Hallam's cables was epitomized for them. In some papers which had been preserved Sabina read a few of her friend's reports. The tears sprang from her eyes.

"We wept, too," said the kindly woman of the house. "To think that our peaceful, verdant, Christian land should be overturned into a shambles and a battleground of brother against brother. Yet the bolsheviks were justified, don't you think so?"

"Murder is never justified," said Father Pokoff.

"Well, what were the executions under the orders of the king? Were they the less murder because he, in place of these others, willed and commanded them?"

The priest and the princess were silent.

"We are not rabid revolutionists," the hostess went on. "We have been on this side some years, and we have learned what freedom means. It does not mean the privilege of killing and robbing. But even the United States became free by bloodshed. When it grew necessary to free three million Negroes, that was accomplished, also, by bloodshed. The war against Germany, which turned into a world fighting for the freedom of the world, was the bloodiest lesson of all. May it not be that those who are now killing in Grodina will be sanctified by history as saviors and not as butchers?"

"They might," said the priest, "were they sincere soldiers of liberty. But they are killing in the name of right when they know in their hearts that they are murderers for premeditated wrong. Have they called an election of the people in order to establish a government of the people? No. Those who had the strongest arms and the biggest guns and the organized gang are killing for slavery, with themselves as masters; these pseudo emancipators are slaying those who refuse to submit to peonage far more inhu-

man than any imposed within this century by kings. Bolshevism may be the symbol of freedom in its most advanced stage. But it is, in actuality, the dirty creed of self-interested bandits, martinetts, usurpers of power over the lives and rights of the weaker, impostors who in the guise of patriots slash and seize like beasts. The bolsheviks now in power are the lowest traitors to Grodina and the most despicable enemies our country has ever suffered."

"They delivered Grodina from the rule of kings."

"And God deliver Grodina from the rule of such deliverers."

"Are you, then, royalists?"

"We are refugees. We take no active sides. We are humble folks who have been fortunate enough to escape from the reeking ruins of what was once our home. If we lean a little toward circumstances in which we were happy, safe, at peace and unmolested, as against conditions which drove us into strange lands—and lucky we were that we reached them at all—I hope you will forgive us if we are a trifle bitter against those who so suddenly rained panic and turmoil, death and destruction upon a little community which, no matter what its system of government, had been a calm, green spot where mothers raised their children and taught them to worship God."

"For my little ward, here, she is too young and inexperienced to pick among the brawls of politics. But to me, a servant of the Lord, no doubt can long survive as to the merits of a government which desecrates the church. Bolshevism is and must be the twin soul of atheism. They feed upon one another, these two infidel philosophies."

"Forgive me, father," said the woman, crossing herself fervently. "I did not think of it in that light. You, of course, must know. I must have been deceived by the high sounding mob cries of 'Liberty' like my poor, blinded relatives at home."

"God have mercy upon them!" whispered the priest.

"Amen," breathed Sabina.

"What do you suppose has become of Sabina, the royal princess?" asked the garrulous landlady.

Sabina straightened with a jolt.

"Too bad about her. I can't find it in my heart to hate her. I saw her once, when she was a little girl, at home. She was riding in the state carriage with the king and queen. It was on Easter Sunday, the day when the royal family always rode through the city after services, blessing babies and giving alms to the poor. The poor little one! She was so pretty, and she looked just like a princess should look—so aristocratic and different from plain people's children. That was about—let me see—about fourteen years ago, or so. She must be quite a woman now. As big, I should say, as Sophia here."

Sabina instinctively turned away her face, as though afraid the resemblance might become more defined in the eyes of the woman.

"Yes, and now? Heaven knows where she is. She might be in America for all we know, eh?"

"Possible," said the priest.

"But if she is they'll find her. A princess can't hide any more than a peacock can lose herself among the sparrows in the street. A princess is different. I've seen pictures of many of them, and they all look different from other people and just like each other. Just think of it—she'd have been a queen. And now no one even knows where

she's gone to. How the world has changed since I was a girl! I remember when the Princess Sabina was born. We had a whole week's holiday from school, and the city was hung with festoons and every one drank raisin wine and wished her royal highness long life and a peaceful reign. I couldn't hate her or hurt her if I were the craziest bolshevik in the world. It was bred into me to pray for her and kneel before her picture. I have a picture of her somewhere—let me see if I can find it."

The woman left the room. Sabina and the

father stared at one another.

This was growing uncomfortable—close. The woman returned.

"There," she said, laying upon the table a chromo, tinted and gauded, which had as its basis a portrait of Sabina at the age of 10. "Isn't she royal? My! Don't you think she's beautiful?"

Sabina smiled.

Now, ordinary children don't look like that. I had a daughter just about her age. She isn't here now—she's married to a grocer in Yonkers. I believe in early marriages. I was married when I was 14. No, I'd know Princess Sabina anywhere—pick her out of a crowd. Did you ever see her?"

The priest nodded that he had.

"You?" she asked of Sabina.

The princess shook her head.

"The dear God watch over her, wherever she may be, the poor orphan," sighed the good woman.

"You are a true Christian," approved the priest.

Not a mile away, in a coffee house beneath a rickety rookery on one of the avenues made dark by the elevated railroad structure, sat Naroush Dupchinsky, the bolshevik agent. Though he had let no one into the grave secret behind his presence in America, his standing as an anarchist was well known to the little circle of Grodnians and other Slavs who greeted him with salves, and who guzzled down the blood with which his narrations of the big events at home was graced.

It was a smelly dive of the kind where aliens foregather and gesticulatingly argue the political convolutions of their native lands. Many of them are exiles who put an ocean between official wrath and their own sweet bodies. Others are malcontents who, having deserted one country and bolted into another, refuse to become citizens and supporters of the flag which wraps them in security, but remain ever in heart and spirit partisans of the domain which has disowned them after maltreating them. Across the brown stained boards of such malodorous lagers international strategies are propounded, imaginary armies are decimated, vexing problems of sociology and integral ethics are tried and judged by the unkempt

vagrants who swarm in the cellars like vermin.

Here treason and nihilism breed in the warmth of the unventilated chambers and in the social filth of the habitués. Not alone kings are damned and the wealthy are ex-coriated, but republican rule, the gentle fabric of man's own weaving in his highest manifestations of civilized brotherhood, is spat upon with that contempt and bitter resentment which these wayward and willful dissenters spew against any and all forms of organized order. "The weapon of the rich," they call all government, these illiterate and dirty immigrants of low breed, who despise all wealth because they cannot grub or steal any for themselves.

In such society Naroush was a pet. Of higher mental quality than most of them, he was still one of them; it flatters a thief or an

outlaw or an outcast to meet his own superior in his own degradation.

Fists thundered upon the tables in applause of Dupchinsky's recitals. Another king had been mauled to death by the holy will of the people—hurrah! Over another community the red flag, as crimson as the blood it cost and the blood it still demanded, was flying flippantly in sight of heaven itself—hurrah! Here was a banquet for the appetites of these scavengers, lusting for the jackal leavings of a lion's mutilated corpse and the fresh, young blood of the lambs now panic stricken and shepherdless in the fenced fields. With smacking lips and rubbing together of itchy palms these army followers, who had not themselves served the courage of their own carnal convictions, clattered their enthusiastic indorsements upon the deeds of those braver wreckers and despoilers and murderers who had bloodied their own talons for "the cause."

The landlord, harboring a drawing card, broke his house rule and for once "set up" the mucky mixture which passed for coffee. Dupchinsky acknowledged the distinction by detailing the death of the king, giving tidbit for tidbit.

"And the princess?" interposed one of the egg-eyed listeners. "Did you get her, too? Or are the reports true that she got away?" Dupchinsky's brow grew furrowed.

"She escaped us—for the time," he said.

"We hear over here that she ran away with her lover, a stable boy, and is in the slums of London with him," volunteered another. "These royal low-lives are all the same, aren't they?"

Dupchinsky leaned forward hungrily.

"Where did you get that kitchen gossip?" he demanded.

"O, it's common talk. It's reasonable enough, isn't it?"

"No. It may sound plausible, but it isn't so. She was in the palace five minutes before we broke into her bedroom. O, if we'd only had the foresight to guard all the doors and let no one through alive. But we'll get her. The arm of liberty is long and its eye is all-seeing. The world isn't big enough to cover her up. Grodina—the people's Grodina—cries aloud for her heart's blood and it shall be drained."

"Hear, hear," cried the rooters.

"Should any of you get any reliable hint as to where she might be, I want you to inform me forthwith. My business here is along other lines, but the soviet will plentifully reward any loyal brother who assists in the inspired work of killing off these royal rats who too long stole from the pantries and the granaries of the poor. It was

decreed by popular acclamation that Sabina must die so that freedom may live. And above such there is no higher law."

"She must die," chorused the worthies, raising their streaked cups.

"If she is in England, or, perchance, in America," ventured one of the more timid yet sympathizing "comrades," "some difficulties may be encountered."

"Difficulties?" cried Naroush. "Silence, fool. What do we care for the childish laws of those countries? Do you think that the will of the people is going to halt or even hesitate because of the silly dictums of nations which are a hundred years behind the new order? England—faugh! America—bah! One is ruled by a sacred kinglet who knows the hours of his false power are counted. The other is run by a herd of rich thieves who are even now burying their loot because they realize that their tribute levying is reaching an end. When I say that the soviet of Grodina has spoken, I say that the greatest power on earth has spoken, because it stands with and is part of the overwhelming force which is sweeping the globe, which will twist into scrap upon the supports of all the antedated political structures everywhere—bolshevism; long may it rule."

The walls quivered with the demonstration that backed up the swaggering pronouncement of Dupchinsky. The landlord almost gave away another "round" of his vile coffee.

"If bolshevism has a duty to perform here," continued Dupchinsky, "bolshevism will ask the leave of no man or no hundred million men. It will strike where and when and how it chooses. No old-fashioned government will dare to oppose it, for if it does its own people will rise and get behind the cause, and disembowel republics and monarchies even sooner than is set down upon the calendar of inevitable fate already. I represent a greater power right here in this country than the president of this country. I have a more numerous and more solid support within his own borders than he has. I defy him and all his laws."

To this insolent sentiment the assembled renegades rose with admiring gusto. In their hearts they all determined thenceforth to be a little bolder, a bit more public and pronounced in their bluster; this herald, fresh from the scenes of anarchist triumph, was unafraid, and he was right, he had been fortified by his own sight of the people's power, thought they, and he knew how far he could safely go. Here they had been hushed and frightened in fear of snooping secret service men. Came now this young hero who threw his convictions with loud and open bravado into the teeth of the world. Such talk as that made bolshevism what it was, and it was, they were beginning to believe, all that the raucous Dupchinsky had said it was; and it was destined to be all that he prophesied for it, they believed.

"Soviet government—the utopian dream of yesterday, the great movement of today

the world power of tomorrow," shrieked Dupchinsky. "O, you should have seen the fishy-eyed dead king—it was beautiful. You should have seen the rich scatter and run against the bayonets of the just, like pigs driven to the slaughter, squealing and crowding, but doomed. You should see the avenging fires of liberty destroying those who stand in the way of progress and brotherhood. You have been pent up here, where policemen club you into silence, where the rich bribe armies to fight you off from your natural rights, where the capitalist press takes the gold of the robber baron to stave the waves of the conquering seas of revolution."

"You have read garbled falsehoods, propaganda of slave owners, maligning the beneficent name of bolshevism. But I have seen with these eyes the destruction of all these flimsy, transitory barricades. I have with these hands helped to tear down the walls which these rascals had built to save themselves against the onrush of outraged humanity. Their silly journals no longer barricaded them. Their hired assassins in uniform no longer defended them. Liberty, drunk with the blood of its time-old enemies, made a clean job of it."

"Today in Grodina there is no man daring enough to claim 'This is mine,' not even his daughter or his wife, not to say inanimate things. Everything is free—free as it was in the Garden of Eden. What you want you take. Man was born with desires, appetites, needs. Placing restrictions between him and these elemental impulses is contrary to the dictates of nature. For centuries men had been able, through selfishness and base means, to keep other men from exercising these preordained, functional wants. At last bolshevism has fought through the artificial barb wire entanglements erected by thieves and hoarders and restored to mankind its primal privileges."

"Can you doubt that such a consummation must win the support of all—all except the minority, which wants to hold its dishonest booty? It needs but leadership and a few more examples such as Grodina has set to flame the remainder of the globe into a realization that limitless freedom is at hand for the mere reaching. We forerunners have placed it there for you slackers, weak and fearful sisters who dare not climb and hazard a fall, but wait until the fruit hangs low enough, near enough to the earth where your clay feet cling, to be plucked without risking—without even stretching."

If the wavering scum had been timid theretofore, the ringing, alluring drivel which Dupchinsky so forcibly had shot into them had made of them political pirates with courage rising to a pitch where they were ready to cut throats or scuttle merchantmen for the glittering treasures which he had pictured to them.

Another criminal alien had been suffered to come into this decent, too hospitable and forgiving country, to corrupt men and to sow in the consecrated soil of a great republic the seeds of rabid revolution from the weeds of lower European morasses. Twenty anarchists left that foul coffee house in the late hours of that night, reinforced and armored in their hatred of law and constituted organization. Street corner shouters had been given courage and material for disseminating the fatal, false, felonious paradoxes of the vultures of Europe.

That which even these conspiring traitors had scarcely dared to think had been uttered, heard, lauded. Never again would the hearers fear to shout their prophecies and their philosophies. It was as though some brainsick fool had challenged God, and because he was not stricken down upon the spot all the insect-souled cowards who had witnessed had become convinced that there was no God.

Bolshevism fights with every weapon, fair or foul. It is a despotism which yields no quarter, spares no enemy, follows no man dates of Christian warfare. Dupchinsky lied. His dirty doctrines will never prevail. But before that lie can be driven back into the throats of Dupchinsky and his kind, decent society must fight back as mercilessly, if not as brutally, as its hydra-headed foe. The Dupchinskys must not be tolerated to enter peaceful lands to spout their poison.

The United States reeks today with bolshevik missionaries from all the scurvy holes of Europe. It is an insidious, infamous, cancerous growth. It must be rooted out—with the knife—with blood-letting if need be, before it takes too deep a hold upon the clean American body.

But this is a patient, amiable nation. It suffered German activities when Germany was as certain to be its antagonist in a struggle for life as bolshevism is now. It suffers now the spokesmen and agitators of foreign riffraff and native Cain in the same good natured, shrugging spirit.

Dupchinsky was brazen because he knew his history and his geography. As he strode from that festered den he felt, hovering over his impudent head, the shield of "free speech," that guardian of the fomenters as well as the preacher, of the ungrateful guest as well as the contributing citizen. And he breathed deeply of the free air of the United States, and with a leer of satisfied triumph upon his lips, he started for his comfortable bed, knowing well that the law and power against which he and his fellow Necros had pointed thumbs down would guard him as he slept, guarantee him safe conduct when he awoke, refreshed for another day's plotting and knifing against God and man.

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